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SUBJECT: UK URGES CHINA TO PRESS IRAN FOR THE RELEASE OF UK
MILITARY PERSONNEL

REF: BEIJING 2042

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Daniel Shields. Reasons 1.
4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) China will do all it can to persuade Iran to return the British military personnel Iran is now holding, MFA International Organizations Deputy Director General Chen Xu said to British Polmincouns Peter Wilson on March 26 in response to Wilson's request that Beijing intervene with Tehran on the matter. MFA Arms Control and Disarmament Department Director General Zhang Yan, who has been participating in P5-plus-Germany Political Directors discussions on Iran issues, is currently seeking to raise the issue with the Iranian Ambassador in Beijing, Chen said.

¶2. (C) Wilson provided Chen with a map illustrating that Iran's seizure of the UK vessel actually occurred in Iraqi waters. Under international law Iran should have only ordered the ship out of the area if Tehran believed the ship was in Iranian waters. Iran has not allowed UK diplomats consular access to the military personnel and the British Government does not know where they are being held. Wilson requested that Beijing emphasize to Tehran the need for British consular access to the individuals. The British press is starting to pressure government officials for statements on the situation and it is growing increasingly difficult for the UK to maintain a low-key approach, Wilson said.

¶3. (C) United States Embassy Polmincouns, who was present at the meeting in the context of a separate discussion on UN Security Council Resolution 1747 (reftel), said he had no instructions on the matter but the United States fully supports the efforts of our British allies to ensure the prompt and safe return of UK military personnel held by Iran.
RANDT